DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 143 HE 011 549

AUTHOR Kafka, Gene F.
TITLE Developing Positive Attitudes of Collescents: Nebraska Looks at the Learning Process in Higher Education.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the conference on Improving University Teaching (London, England, July, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *Educational Improvement; Educational Quality; Emotional Development; Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; *Learning; Personality Development; Self Concept; *Student Characteristics; Student Experience; *Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Influence

ABSTRACT

The importance of introspection as a method of learning for the college student (collescent) is examined. The roles and expectations of the teacher and the collescent in the "teacher-learner dyad" are also discussed. It is suggested that a higher level of learning in American colleges is possible through the process of introspection. The responsibility for the learning process is viewed as the student's job. Since the total learning process is dependent on feelings and attitudes it is suggested that through introspection the student should: (1) develop competence; (2) manage emotions; (3) work towards freeing interpersonal relationships; (4) develop purpose; (5) develop integrity; (6) develop identity; and (7) develop autonomy. The importance of a healthy self-image and self-confidence for successful learning is emphasized. The Zeigarnik effect of learning (incomplete tasks raise the learning quotient) and the Socratic method are presented as two ways of increasing the level of sophistication in American institutions of higher education. (Author/SF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED174143

MAY 17 1979

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING POSITIVE ATTITUDES OF COLLESCENTS:
NEBRASKA LOOKS AT THE LEARNING PROCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Gene F. Kafka
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Learning is living and living is learning! This paper suggests a higher level of learning in American colleges is possible through the process of introspection, or, "To discover oneself with one's own thoughts, emotions, and feelings."

An examination of the teaching role function suggests that by far the greatest role a teacher can play is the human role.

The responsibility for the learning process rests with the collescent. The tasks of collescence includes (1) development of competence, (2) the management of emotions, (3) the freeing of interpersonal relationships, (4) development of purpose, (5) the development of integrity, (6) the development of identity, and (7) the development of autonomy.

The Zeigarnik effect of learning, incomplete tasks raises the learning quotient; the Socratic teaching method, asking questions in the teaching process are presented as two positive ways of increasing the level of sophisication in American institutions of higher education.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Rene F. Kafka

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE011549

DEVELOPING POSITIVE ATTITUDES OF COLLESCENTS:
NEBRASKA LOOKS AT THE LEARNING PROCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Gene F. Kafka
University of Nebraska at Omaha

This paper shall examine learning in terms of the impact teachers have on the process, the results of prior learning of the collescents (1), and the impact the student/collescent should have on his/her own learning how to learn. The learner is seen as possessing the responsibility of learning how to learn; however, the teacher is seen as a positive model to illustrate and open up new motives for the learner.

The total learning process is dependent upon both the feelings and attitudes of the learner and the teacher. Even more significant, if the learner has a positive self-concept, a greater degree of cognitive development will take place; conversely, if the learner possesses a low self-concept and has negative feelings, the total learning process will be greatly blocked. The teacher, too, must be made keenly aware of his/her feelings and attitudes.

On a national radio program in November, 1976, the announcer was reviewing some research data which suggested that over 76 per cent of the adult working class was unsatisfied with their work and overall had negative attitudes about themselves. Assuming there is bound to be a representative sample of college graduates included in this sample, a conclusion about the total effectiveness of college and the experiences could come under some sort of attack. What are the colleges and universities of the United States of America doing to promote a healthy self-image and self-concept? What are the short-term and long-range goals of American institutions of higher education?

---

(1) The term collescence is defined by Long as "a stage of development after adolescence to define more clearly and describe the personality growth of students between the ages of 17 and 25 who are interacting in, with, toward, against, or beside the college environment."

The thrust of this paper will focus on a special kind of learning that is perceived to be at a higher than the formal academic learning, i.e., introspection, or to preoccupy oneself with one's own thoughts, emotions, and feelings. In addition, attention will be given to reviewing the roles and expectations of the teacher and collescent in the teacher-learner dyad.

Throughout American institutions of higher education, better and more positive learning patterns can be developed through an elimination of a number of problem areas for the beginning collescent. These problem areas are strong enough to expell energy away from the pure academic pursuits. American culture is a career-oriented society; therefore, selecting a career choice, as it relates to a major field of study, is the strongest concern facing the collescent.

Another area of concern is also cultural, i.e., the use of time and how the collescent views time. Collescents and others want instant answers to those important questions. Mainly, the collescent has been conditioned to expect things to happen instantly. The culture has introduced time-saving devices such as high-speed tools, frozen convenience foods, and the quick food restaurant industry. Thus, today's collescent is the product of a fast-moving society with the fundamental question: Where do I want to go?

What does the beginning collescent expect from the college experience? What role, or roles, does the collescent want to play? Are the perceptions of academic environment consistent with the institution?

Past learning has a tremendous and powerful effect on both present and future learning. Many collescents have a number of fears, some real, some unfounded, but present never the less; these fears are brought on by achieving adulthood.

As examples of prior learning, the writer would like to suggest that the following parallelisms are significant because of what the collescent brings to

the college campus.

Collescents learn what they live. If a collescent has lived with criticism, he has learned to condemn. If a collescent has lived with hostility, he has learned to fight. If a collescent has lived with ridicule, he has learned to be shy. If a collescent lives with shame, he has learned to feel guilty. If a collescent has lived with tolerance, he has learned to be patient. If a collescent has lived with encouragement, he has learned confidence. If a collescent has lived with praise, he has learned to appreciate. If a collescent has lived with fairness, he has learned justice. If a collescent has lived with security, he has learned to have faith. If a collescent has lived with approval, he has learned to like himself. If a collescent has lived with acceptance and friendship, he has learned to find love in the world. (2)

An examination of the teaching function is necessary to review the teacher-learner dyad. Watson (3) has warned "Only a small part of the teaching that goes on in the world takes place in schools. Everyone learns more outside of the classroom than within it. And most of what he learns comes not from books, but from other people. The teacher-learner dyad is even more ubiquitous than that of parent and child."

In examining the role of a teacher, Wilbert J. McKeachie (4) wrote a book for the beginning college teacher reviewing the six roles of teachers. The six roles include, the teacher as an expert, as formal authority, as a socializing agent, as a facilitator, as an ego ideal, and as a person. The final role, the teacher as a person, is often forgotten for the other rules are considered more important. However, is this really true?

Beyond the fact that the teacher knows more about the field than the student, beyond the fact that the teacher has certain rights and duties which flow from his position in the larger system, beyond the fact that the teacher is a gatekeeper to the various collectivities of which he is a part, beyond the fact that the teacher can sometimes be of use to the student who is formulating and pursuing his own goals, and beyond the fact that the teacher can upon occasion find the energy and skill to satisfy his own standards of excellence, beyond all these facts remains the inescapable fact that the teacher is also a PERSON. (4:68-72)

To illustrate the importance of teaching, the Hazen Foundation (5) sought to devote attention to the teacher to learn as much as possible about the student.

The wise yound teacher of undergraduates will quickly recognize that he must give some time and attention to the study of his students. ... he (the teacher)

will soon be confronted with one of the elementary laws of learning, that the building of new comprehension must always start with what the student brings to the teaching situation. (31)

In order to facilitate this introspection, the writer suggests that teachers in college spend some time in review of their current state of mind. Chickering (6) identified "The Tasks of Collescence". The writer feels these tasks represent "the highest level of learning, who am I?"

DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE

Competence is seen as an inner sense of adequacy, proficiency, and ability. It increases as one's intellectual, vocational and interpersonal resources and skills improve. (1:6)

The single most important factor with respect to the self-concept deals with the "inner sense of adequacy". By utilizing and building the collescent's strengths, and not weaknesses, the sense of worth will be promoted to a high degree. Many collescents are unaware of unsure of their personal strengths. It is necessary and vital to have the collescent explain their inner thoughts to understand their personal strengths.

THE MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONS

The emotional nature of a person influences and at the same time determines his/her ability to perceive, think and behave. An important task for the collescent is to completely be aware of his/her feelings, to develop an increased understanding of them, and to recognize how they may serve as valid sources of information regarding his contemplated behavior or his/her decisions about future plans. (1:7)

The key element for the collescent and the responsiblity of the college is that somewhere and somehow personal feelings are allowed to surface. Our feelings are significant in terms of how we treat other human beings. There is a tremendous amount of introspective behavior that needs to surface.

---

(6) The majority of ideas and concepts regarding the Tasks of Collescence have been developed in Chickering's publications. Long and Long have expanded some of his "Vectors of Change" and condensed others.

THE FREEING OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The developmental change from narcissism to an increased sense of altruism is fostered by developing freer interpersonal relationships. This task should be distinguished from interpersonal competence, in which one is concerned about managing self and others in order to accomplish a particular task. (1:7)

The college brings together people from different cultures and value structures. Consequently, the learning process that is fostered for the collescent should develop a sense of patient understanding for differing points of view. Learning to listen, really listen, is of critical importance if one is to understand how other people feel. What are these signs...what are the collescents saying? Please listen to me because I have something to say...just please listen!

DEVELOPMENT OF PURPOSE

The restless, random, and sometimes contradictory behavior of collescents occurs when they are all dressed up and don't know where to go. During this period, the collescent needs to define for him/herself his/her 'personal' (sic) identity...(1:8)

Learning who one is, "really is, that is" can be a very frightening experience; and, the collescent, during this period of time, discloses needs which require a great deal of support and personal assurance. Getting the collescent to explore the avenues of his/her mind promotes a great deal of introspection, and it is at this point when support and clarification from adults can be crucial.

The collescent who does not have a personal goal is frustrated; frustration in people of all ages is caused by the absence of direction and goals. Collescents are "expected" to know what they want out of life because they ascertained instant adults. But this is not necessarily true. One of the greatest needs of the collescent is to learn who they are, and the college/university has a responsibility to assist the collescent to find answers to their questions about their identity.

The need for "Living and Learning" centers, formerly Counseling centers, will increase as the search for purpose (meaning in one's life) becomes more difficult.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRITY

Closely allied with the development of purpose is the development of a personal value system: a valid set of beliefs that are internally consistent and provide a framework for behavior in relationship to the specific realities that one experiences. (1:8)

The challenge of the value system of the collescent is one of the basic goals of American higher education. Through reading assignments and discussion groups the thought processes are expanded and tested. Being tested is to complete the total learning process. Prior learning of the collescent plays a significant role in terms of response to past exposure and developed attitudes.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY

Identity is the development of an inner sense of congruence, oneness, and coherence that answers the critical question, "Who am I?" How the collescent feels about him/herself becomes more important than the adolescent concern for the approval and acceptance of others. (1:9)

A heightened sense of identity begins for the collescent when asked two fundamental (redundant) questions: "Hi, what's your name?" and "What's your major?" No wonder a large percentage of collescents change their majors, change their initial career option, or withdraw from college completely when they learn something they didn't expect, i.e., getting serious about the contrast between who I think I am and who I really may be.

Fostering a positive self-concept begins when the collescent first arrives on campus. Learning takes place well before the first class. First, collescents must get registered for classes. Sometimes things do not necessarily work out the way they're supposed to. The prior learning the collescent brings with him/her normally will surface in a behavior pattern which is consistent with what has worked in the past...or will it?

DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMY

Autonomy involves a development of emotional independence, instrumental independence, and functioning independence. Emotional independence is the ability

to be free of continual and pressing needs for personal reassurance, affection, and approval. Instrumental independence consists of the ability to carry on tasks in the face of frustrations and the ability to cope with problems without becoming dependent upon others. The capstone is the development of functioning independence when the collescent (learns) (sic) that parents cannot be dispensed with except at the price of continuing emotional pain for all parties concerned; that one cannot be supported comfortably without working for a living; that the benefits from the social structure cannot be received without contributing to that structure; and that loving and being loved are necessarily complementary; interdependence exists. (1:10)

The culmunation of learning activity and process involves the collescent and the way in which he/she relate to the autonomy themes. Again a large amount of introspection is necessary to answer the questions: What kind of a person am I?" "What kind of a person do I want to become?" "What steps or measures will I take to get there?"

To complete a simple message, the writer would like to suggest two examples of providing a positive learning experience for the beginning collescent. As presented earlier, collescents need an opportunity to explore their thoughts in relationship to the total academic and learning environment, especially in higher education. The first method is that as suggested by a Russian psychologist B. Zergarnik. (7) The Zergarnik effect is presented because of its true learning principle, i.e., "the tendency to recall uncompleted tasks is greater than completed tasks." In Zergarnik's study, students of mathematics were given tasks, one half of which were interrupted and one half carried through to completion. The results concluded that completed tasks tend to be forgotten because the motivation to perform them is satified, while the drive persists and enhances memory when they are left uncompleted.

In many formal classrooms, higher education in particular, academic subjects are often overtaught. There is no room for individual creativity which allows the collescent a sincere chance to develop a theory or personal involvement. The writer would encourage a careful review of the teaching techniques as they relate to the Zergarnik effect.

Another example of developing positive learning patterns is suggested through the Socratic Method of Teaching. Named for Socrates, when in his own words, "I cannot teach a person anything; all I can do is to get him to think." The Socratic method of teaching is enhanced through asking questions; Do you understand? Is this clear to you? How do you feel about what it is you are learning? What would you like to learn? The teacher who uses the Socratic method will find a greater participation in classes plus collescents will want to talk after class. Why? The collescent will be drawn to the teacher who illustrates that he/she really cares about what happens to collescents. And isn't this attitude one which is desired in the college classroom?

Bibliography

(1) Long, Nicholas J., and Long, Jody. Conflict and Comfort in College: Mental Health of The Collescent. Wadsworth Publishing Company. Belmont, California, 1970. (p. 1-11)

(2) Author unknown. Original statement is, "Children Learn What They Live". The writer first saw this list in a pediatrian's office.

(3) Watson, Goodwin. Social Psychology: Issues and Insights. J. B. Tippencott Company, Philadephia, Pennsylvania, 1966.

(4) McKeachie, Wilbert, I. Teaching Tips: A Guidenbook for the Beginning College Teacher. Seventh Edition. D. C. Heath and Company. Lexington, Massachusetts. p. 68-82. 1978.

(5) The Hagen Foundation: Report of the Committee on Undergraduate Education. The Importance of Teaching: A Memorandum to the New College Teacher. p. 31, (No date listed).

(6) Chickering, Arthur W. Education and Identity, Jossey-Bass, Inc. San Francisco, California, 1969. In addition, the reader may be interested to read through Dr. Chickering's writing from which Long and Long obtained their concepts. "Institutional Differences and Student Characteristics," Journal of the American College Health Association (December 1966); "College Residents and Student Development," Educational Record of the American Council of Education (Spring 1967), pp. 179-186; "Curriculum, Teaching, and Evaluation: Implications for Student Development, Mental Health, and Counseling," National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal, 5 (October 1967); and particularly "The Young Adult: A New and Needed Course for College Personnel Administrators," Journal of the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors, 30 (Spring 1967), 98-110.

(7) Vol. II, The Encyclopedia of Human Behavior: Psychology, Psychiatry, and Mental Health. Robert M. Goldenson, Ph.D. Doubleday & Co. 1970, p. 382.